Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

Centre canadien d'hygiène et de sécurité au travail

Check-list and Guidelines for Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committees

Organizational Factors

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CHECK-LIST AND GUIDELINES FOR JOINT OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEES

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Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

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CHECK-LIST AND GUIDELINES FOR JOINT OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEES: ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

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INTRODUCTION

More can be accomplished in preventing accidents and the incidence of industrial diseases by involving people from all levels in the workplace in the health and safety effort. One vehicle for expanding involvement is the joint occupational health and safety committee.

In the past, the effectiveness of many such committees has suffered from a lack of proper structure, clear statements of purpose and duties, and standard procedures for meetings. The following list of questions and comments has been designed to stimulate discussion on these organizational features. Comments about specific committee duties, such as inspections or accident investigations, are not within the scope of this document. Some issues are more important than others, but the order of presentation does not imply priorities. Since there will be variation in such items as jurisdictions, industries, and size of enterprise, the comments need to be viewed in light of local circumstances, and interpreted accordingly. Aside from legislated requirements, there is not necessarily a 'correct' answer to every question, although many committee problems are universal, with generally applicable solutions.

The title suggests a dual purpose for the document, its use depending upon the maturity and experience of the committee. For committees of long standing, it might be used as an audit guide to examine the existing structure and function. For example, each committee member could answer the questions without reference to the comments, followed by full committee discussion of the members' answers and the comments noted here. For newly formed or about-to-be formed committees, the questions and comments highlight areas which should be considered during preliminary discussions. In any case, it should be noted that the document is not intended to be used to answer individual questions in isolation, but each section should be read in its entirety to reach a more balanced overview of possible problems and their solutions.

A few conventions used should be noted. The term 'health and safety committee' is used as an abbreviated form of 'joint occupational health and safety committee'. Unless specified, reference is made to a single committee, whether the organization has more than one committee or not. None of the comments refer to the position of "safety representative" found in the legislation of several provinces. The pronoun 'he' should be read as 'he/she'. 'Labour' refers to those workers (unionized or not) who are not in supervisory, managerial, or staff positions in an organization.

While this review deals specifically with health and safety committees, it must be emphasized that such committees do not replace an overall safety program, but form only a part, albeit an important part, of that program. Aspects of the overall program which are of prime significance to the committee's effectiveness are sincere, demonstrated management and worker support, clearly enunciated objectives and policy on health and safety, and statements of the responsibilities and roles of everyone in the organization.

A bibliography on further reading is available from CCOHS on request. Your comments and questions are invited.

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1. STRUCTURE

1.1 Is a committee legally required?

In all Canadian jurisdictions the formation of joint health and safety committees is either mandatory or subject to ministerial decision. Certain types of workplaces may be exempt from this requirement, depending on the size of workforce, industry, accident record, or some combination of these factors. Consult the applicable legislation to establish the legal requirement in your case. In some workplaces, a collective agreement may stipulate not only that a committee is required, but it may also prescribe terms of reference beyond the minimum legal requirements of any pertinent legislation. Note that a collective agreement may add to, but not reduce, the provisions of such requirements.

1.2 Does the committee structure meet legal requirements?

Where committees are required, the legislation or collective agreement may specify the minimum and/or maximum number of members, the ratio of management/labour members, the method of selecting members, chairmanship, meeting frequency, and duties and rights of the committee. Again, consult the appropriate sources for these details.

1.3 How many members are there on the committee?

The legislation or collective agreement may specify a minimum and/or maximum number of members, usually dependent on the number of workers at the site. Too few workers may mean that all segments of the workforce are not represented, while too many members may make the committee unwieldy, resulting in more debate and less action. In deciding the ideal committee size, consider:

- total number of workers
- number of different trades or unions involved
- complexity of the operation

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- degree of hazard in work
- whether all segments of workforce are represented (management, supervisors, male workers, female workers, office staff)
- whether the committee encompasses adequate knowledge of conditions, processes, practices.

1.4 What is the ratio of management to labour members on the committee?

In jurisdictions where committees are required, the law states that management members on the committee must not outnumber the labour members. The advantage of a committee which has been jointly structured is that the in-depth practical knowledge of specific tasks (labour) is brought together with the larger overview of job inter-relationships, company policies, and procedures (management). Another significant benefit is the enhancement of a co-operative attitude among all segments of the workforce toward solving health and safety problems.

1.5 How are labour members on the committee selected?

Some jurisdictions specify how the labour members on the committee are to be selected. Consult the applicable regulations in your case. If not specified, selection might be made through election by the workers, appointment by the union, or less formally by simple choice of either the workers or management. The last alternative is not recommended, as workers should have the power to select their own representatives, if the committee is to be a joint one in the true sense of the term.

1.6 Do members have relevant work experience?

Since there is a limit to the number of people who can be appointed to the health and safety committee, it is important that they be chosen with due regard to relevant work experience. Priority might be given to workers with varied work backgrounds and to those involved in the more hazardous and complex operations. Workers with longer service in the industry will usually have greater appreciation of the overall work carried out and its associated safety problems, and they should therefore be able to contribute more to health and safety committee activities. On the other hand, selection of individuals who have developed bad work habits and tendency to resist change as a result of long experience should be avoided.

1.7 Are appropriate people appointed?

Experience should not be the only criterion relied on for the appointment of health and safety committee members. Ideally, they will be the best people available--good communicators, peer group leaders, and most importantly, sincerely concerned with safety. Staff with safety related duties, such as the fire marshall, plant nurse, or industrial hygienist might serve as resource people, (for the role of the safety co-ordinator see question 1.10). To avoid the impression (or reality) of meetings being controlled by these personnel, their attendance should be restricted to occasions when matters specific to their expertise are discussed.

1.8 Are there alternates for each member?

To ensure representation of all segments of the workforce at every meeting, alternates should be appointed to act during the absence of regular members. In order that the alternate can make a useful contribution on these occasions, the regular member should keep him fully briefed at all times on committee activities. If new regular members are recruited from the ranks of alternates, the experience and continuity of the committee is enhanced.

1.9 What is the term of office?

One school of thought recommends that members be rotated rapidly (for example, every three months), thereby exposing more members to training in safety. The counter argument is that under this system, the health and safety committee evolves into little more than a training group, less likely to accomplish meaningful results in solving health and safety problems. When the same people serve on the committee for a long period, enthusiasm may wane, with fewer new ideas injected, and little educational spinoff generated. On the other hand, the members become more experienced, have an opportunity to gain the respect of co-workers and a spirit of teamwork can be developed. Unless legislated otherwise, a two-year term may be the best compromise, with staggered rotation so that new members are substituted one at a time.

1.10 Is the safety co-ordinator's role relative to the committee clearly defined?

The functions of the safety co-ordinator and the health and safety committee are closely intertwined, and their

relationship must be clearly defined to prevent misunderstanding and conflict. It would seem logical that the safety co-ordinator should attend every committee meeting, but his role at these meetings may be that of resource person, advisor, or guest. Whatever that role is, the committee should not be controlled (or seen to be controlled) by him. The importance of deciding what his exact role in relation to the health and safety committee should be is such that this question is a priority item to be resolved through mutual discussion.

1.11 How many committees are there?

Depending on the number of workers, complexity of operations, or geographic dispersion, it may be prudent to have more than one committee. In these cases, a co-ordinating central committee, with representation from each local committee is recommended. In very large organizations, a tiered system of committees with a hierarchical reporting arrangement may be in place. This structure has the advantage of assuring full representation without too many members on a single committee (see question 1.3).

1.12 Are ad hoc committees or sub-committees formed when necessary?

Changes brought about by events such as the introduction of new products, major construction, or the installation of new equipment generate new safety problems. Given the time constraints imposed by each member's primary duties in the organization, the ability of the committee to cope with these special circumstances may be limited. It might be advisable to form an ad hoc committee to deal specifically with these contingencies. Obviously, members chosen to serve on such temporary committees should have the particular experience and expertise required, but in all cases, the permanent health and safety committee should be represented. Permanent sub-committees consisting of regular members are sometimes formed to look after specific committee tasks, such as safety education, while ad hoc sub-committees may deal with problems requiring in-depth study and extraordinary expenditures of time. When used, these secondary committees report back to the main committee and free it to carry on its primary tasks.

1.13 Are members compensated for time spent on health and safety committee activities?

In order not to create disincentives to serve, committee members should be compensated for all time spent on committee activities. In some jurisdictions, this is a legislated right. With shift-work, this provision is especially important to ensure full attendance at meetings and that all committee tasks are carried out.

1.14 Are members trained in health and safety?

Members should be adequately trained in health and safety in order for them to contribute fully to all committee activities. Items in such training should include:

- committee responsibilities/authority
- occupational health and safety law
- principles of accident causation
- hazard recognition
- job safety analysis
- industrial hygiene
- methods of raising safety awareness
- inspections
- accident investigation
- effective oral communication.

1.15 Is the structure reviewed periodically and revised when necessary?

When a review of the health and safety committee's responsibilities/duties has led to major revisions (see question 2.5), the structure of the committee should be reviewed to see that it is appropriately organized to fulfill its modified role.

2. DUTIES

2.1 Is the purpose of the committee clearly defined?

It might be assumed that the purpose of a joint occupational health and and safety committee is straightforward, inherently expressed in its name. If this purpose has not been specified

by legislation or in a collective agreement, it is worthwhile to attempt to specify that purpose in simple terms since such a statement serves as the basis for later definition of the committee's duties/responsibilities. If too many objectives are specified, it can lead to a fragmentation of effort, with members pulling in different directions as determined by their individual perceptions of priorities. Examples of viable statements of purpose found in safety literature are:

- create and maintain active interest in safety and reduce accidents
- discuss and take effective action on the principal accident-causing conditions
- help stimulate an awareness of safety issues and an atmosphere of co-operation between management and workers
- help in identifying problems, formulating policy and procedures, monitoring and improving them.

From these examples, it can be seen that in the past, joint occupational health and safety committees have served in a participatory and consultative role, unlike executive or management committees which have wider decision-making authority. In recent years some progressive companies have moved toward delegating greater responsibility/authority to health and safety committees, and some jurisdictions have legislated to them a degree of power to make decisions on health and safety matters. This trend has been advanced by high quality work done by the committees themselves. The end result is greater meaningful worker participation at the level where accidents and health hazards are most commonly encountered. The declared purpose of the committee should be included in the company safety policy statement.

2.2 To whom does the committee report?

Like individuals, a group must know to whom it is accountable for the discharge of its responsibilities. It might be said that each committee member is accountable to the chairman, and the committee is accountable to all employees for matters within its sphere of activity. Practically, however, it is necessary to be more specific if prompt followup on recommendations is to be expected. Where a senior co-ordinating committee exists in a multi-tiered health and safety committee structure, reports and recommendations which require higher authority for implementation are usually passed to this body. For matters where departmental authority is sufficient or where only one committee exists, the best choice is usually a member of senior management from the line organization, since this person is most likely to be able to

take, or expedite direct action on problems presented to him. Staff positions such as the safety co-ordinator or personnel department may be in a less favourable position to do this. In any case, the individual to whom the committee reports should be fully knowledgeable about committee duties, health and safety issues, and committed to the prevention of occupational injuries and illnesses. The committee's terms of reference should clearly state to whom the committee is responsible for its actions.

2.3 Are members' duties clearly defined?

Once the purpose of the committee has been established (question 2.1), all members should work together to identify specific duties. These may vary with factors such as the type and size of the organization, industry, number of safety specialist staff in the organization, the firm's accident experience, and the number of committees. Items which might be considered are:

- attend all committee meetings
- promote health and safety at all times
- act as a sounding board on workers' acceptance of health and safety policy
- receive, consider, and resolve worker health and safety complaints
- provide feedback on workers' suggestions
- promote and monitor compliance with health and safety regulations
- attempt to raise health and safety standards above legal requirements
- investigate and advise on refusal to do unsafe work cases
- assist in the training of new workers
- participate in the identification and control of physical hazards
- participate in assessments and the development of control programs for hazardous substances
- participate in accident investigations and inquiries
- study safety programs of other companies to enhance own program
- conduct health and safety education programs
- make health and safety recommendations
- carry out audit inspections
- advise on personal protective equipment
- maintain records of accidents
- monitor effectiveness of health and safety program
- assist in the development of health and safety rules
- assist in the development of safe work procedures
- other activities as indicated by accident experience.

Additional duties for the committee chairman and secretary are discussed in questions 3.7 and 3.8.

2.4 Is a list of duties available for each member?

When the duties/tasks of health and safety committee members have been specified, they should be produced in written form, posted in the workplace, and a copy issued to each member. In this way members can periodically review their duties. This document may be used as a briefing/training guide for new members, and as an information source for all workers.

2.5 Are duties reviewed periodically and revised when necessary?

When circumstances such as organizational changes or major physical changes in the workplace occur, the list of duties of committee members should be reviewed and amended as the situation warrants. Since a number of piecemeal minor changes may take place over an extended period, it may be prudent to review the responsibilities/duties at set intervals.

2.6 Do committee activities support, but not supplant, the firm's safety policy?

A comprehensive list of health and safety committee activities, perhaps combined with full-time safety specialists on staff, might lead an organization into believing that it has fulfilled its safety requirements. It must be clearly understood that this is not so. Safety committee activities are only one part of an overall safety program which also includes considerations such as individual responsibility (management, supervisor, worker), training, provision of medical and first aid facilities, and preventive maintenance. Of course, health and safety committee activities must support and in no way work at counter purposes to a meaningful overall safety program.

2.7 Do members understand the role of the health and safety committee within the overall safety program?

Committee members should be fully conversant with the firm's overall safety program and the committee's role within that

program. *Only then will they be in a position to suggest* improvements to the program as required, and able to deal with safety issues effectively.

2.8 Do members know what their duties are?

Individuals or groups cannot be expected to carry out their duties unless they know what they are. A list of duties in itself cannot be relied upon to ensure that each committee member understands what is required of him. The list of duties should be discussed, either individually or in committee, and each member's understanding checked.

2.9 Do members carry out their duties?

A well structured health and safety committee with a clear-cut purpose and composed of knowledgeable members who are fully aware of their responsibilities will still be ineffective if the committee does not carry out its duties. There may be other reasons for lack of committee effectiveness (see question 4.1), but if the problem is internal to the committee, it should be within its power to rectify it. Generally, most people are dedicated to safety, but constraints may be imposed by conflicts of interest, personality, or pressure of external priorities. These situations should be resolved as soon as they become evident, to enable the committee to concentrate on its prime objective--health and safety.

2.10 Is the committee's authority clearly defined?

When an individual or group is delegated responsibility for a set of activities, authority commensurate with those responsibilities must also be granted, if it is expected that they be carried out. Although in most cases the health and safety committee acts only in a consultative role, nevertheless a degree of authority is required for it to operate effectively. The provincial or federal jurisdiction which legislated the requirement for a health and safety committee may also have promulgated a minimum amount of authority which that committee must have. Examples would be the right to participate in inspections and investigations, advise on refusal to do unsafe work cases, hold regular meetings, and monitor compliance with regulations. Check the appropriate legislation for such features in your case. An organization may expand on the minimum authority granted by legislation. This may take the form of increased authority for the committee as a whole, committee members, the chairman, the secretary, or

some combination thereof. Normally such increased authority does not extend to situations where a supervisor's responsibility might be overridden, such as correcting unsafe acts or shutting down an unsafe operation (unless imminent danger exists). Obviously, a committee member should have the right to discuss the resolution of safety matters with any supervisor. As with all health and safety committee procedural matters, the degree of extended authority should be resolved through joint labour/management discussion. In any case, the degree of committee's authority should be clearly defined and permanently recorded.

2.11 Do members know the extent of their authority?

As with duties (question 2.8), each member must know the extent of his authority in dealing with safety matters. The written statement of authority should be reviewed with each committee member, and his understanding of it confirmed.

2.12 Is the degree of authority reviewed and revised when necessary?

Following a revision of duties (question 2.5), a review of the health and safety committee's authority should be made to ensure that an appropriate match still exists. Other occasions where such a review may be necessary would be when the committee is unable to carry out a specific task due to lack of authority, or when committee members are perceived as regularly exceeding their authority.

2.13 Do members exceed their authority?

If various members of the health and safety committee routinely exceed their authority in the performance of their duties, it is probable that either there is something wrong with their stated responsibilities and/or level of authority, or they do not have a clear set of guidelines to follow. In both cases, a review of the terms of reference is indicated. Where one individual is found to regularly exceed his authority, the terms of reference should be reviewed with him and his subsequent performance monitored. Since the selection of members rests with the workers and management, rather than within the health and safety committee itself, a procedure for recommending dismissal of individual members might be considered in committee.

3. COMMITTEE MEETINGS

3.1 Does the committee meet regularly?

In some jurisdictions, by law the health and safety committee must meet at least monthly or quarterly. Under certain circumstances, such as the initial stages of a newly formed committee or where extraordinary safety problems surface, it may be necessary to meet more often than the legal minimum. In organizations where accidents appear to be under control, meeting time can still be effectively utilized in additional safety education for the members. A committee which does not meet on a regular basis will lose its drive, and will be perceived by workers and management to be of limited use.

3.2 Is 100% attendance achieved at meetings?

Safety committees should not be satisfied at just having a quorum at each meeting, but should strive for 100% attendance. Obviously this goal is seldom achievable in cases where alternates have not been named, stressing the importance of this provision. Non-attendance leaves segments of the workforce without representation, creates discontinuity in committee activities, indicates a lack of commitment to the objectives of safety, and reduces the credibility of the committee as a whole.

3.3 Are meetings frequently postponed?

Meetings should be scheduled well in advance, ideally for a set time of day and day of week to promote regular attendance and allow preparation time by the members. Once the time and date is set, the meeting should not be postponed except for the most pressing emergency reasons. Frequently postponed meetings will be seen as symptoms of lack of interest in safety, lack of management commitment, and lack of committee leadership. Whether these conditions actually exist or not, the effectiveness of the committee will be downgraded.

3.4. What time of day are meetings held?

The timing of meetings may be contingent on factors which are difficult to control. For example, when different shifts have to be represented, a time immediately before or after a shift change might be chosen. This timing would probably conflict with the times when many key employees are most needed at their

workstation. Ideally, meetings should be held during the middle of the day shift with provision made to compensate non-day shift workers who are required to attend. Whatever time is chosen, it should be the same for each meeting to promote attendance and to emphasize the importance of health and safety committee activities.

3.5 Where are meetings held?

Another factor which influences both the capability of a committee to do its work and the perception of its importance is the location where the meetings are held. A crowded office or a lunchroom does little to promote effective meetings. Where available, a conference room equipped with appropriate training aids such as flip charts, chalk boards, and screens would be ideal. In any case, the area chosen should be one where meetings can be held under quiet, uninterrupted conditions.

3.6 Do meetings start and stop on schedule?

Like all important, well-organized meetings, those of the health and safety committee should start promptly at the designated time. Tardy starts are another warning sign of the lack of interest or commitment by members. On the other hand, since committee members have other duties to perform, meetings should also close at the scheduled time. Obviously, the chairman has more control over the latter circumstance.

3.7 Are meetings frequently interrupted?

No matter how carefully it is planned, any meeting which is frequently interrupted by telephone calls, people popping in to discuss something with individuals, or where committee members are called out of the room, will degenerate into a state of disorganization. Even worse, the loud and clear message of such disruptions is that the meeting is not very important, and certainly secondary to the normal day-to-day activities in the company. Interruptions should be curtailed by holding the meeting in an appropriate location (see question 3.5) and educating all staff on the necessity of not disturbing the meeting.

3.8 Are the chairman's duties and authority clearly specified?

In addition to the general duties and authority of all committee members (questions 2.3 and 2.9), the chairman must

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assume extra responsibilities. On committees with co-chairmen or alternating chairmen, a decision should be made whether these responsibilities are shared all the time or taken in turn (in some jurisdictions, the method of chairing meetings is legislated). For continuity, the first choice seems preferable. Specific chairman's duties may include:

- schedule meetings, notify members
- prepare an agenda
- invite specialists or resource persons as required
- preside over meeting
- guide meeting as per agenda
- ensure all discussion items end with a positive decision
- review and approve the minutes
- assign projects to members
- ensure that committee carries out its function.

A list of duties describing the chairman's responsibilities and authority should be available to all members.

3.9 Are the secretary's duties clearly specified?

The secretary's additional responsibilities may vary, depending on several factors. Where only a single chairman has been appointed, the secretary may be required to assume these duties in his absence. If the safety co-ordinator acts as a permanent secretary for a single-chairman committee it may be preferable to have some other member assume the chair in such cases. In any event, the secretary's duties may include:

- keep pertinent records
- report on the status of recommendations
- prepare the minutes
- after approval, distribute the minutes
- disseminate safety information to members
- assist the chairman as required.

The written job description should be available to all members.

3.10 Is an agenda prepared for each meeting?

An agenda serves both as a guide to members' preparation for the meeting and as an outline for the order of business at the meeting itself. Items which might be considered are:

- roll call
- introduction of visitors
- approval of minutes

- business arising from the minutes (including progress reports on outstanding items)
- reports (inspections, accidents, statistics)
- new business (itemized)
- educational session
- time, date, place of next meeting.

3.11 What is the procedure for inclusion of new items of business on the agenda?

All employees (management and labour) should be encouraged to submit items to their committee representatives, who must be given the opportunity to present them for discussion. However, since the committee has only a limited time to deal with all health and safety aspects, these items should be screened before the whole committee addresses them. Priorities might be established based on accident experience, inspection reports, or events such as the introduction of new equipment or procedures. Items which should never appear on the agenda are those which can be dealt with as a normal line function, such as 'fix-it' problems, unless such items remain unresolved over time. Approval of agenda items could be made by the committee as a whole, but here the danger lies in spending too much time on discussing priorities rather than on actual safety problems. The decision might best be left to the discretion of the co-chairmen, or chairman and secretary, as long as both labour and management are represented in the decision.

3.12 Is the agenda distributed to all members well before each meeting?

One of the reasons for preparing an agenda is to allow each member to prepare adequately for the meeting. This preparation may entail discussions with the group he represents, study of safety problems noted on the agenda, or some other type of information gathering. Obviously, each member needs to know the topics under consideration in order to contribute effectively at the meeting.

3.13 Is meeting time used in a productive manner?

The use of a detailed agenda will assist in ensuring that committee meetings proceed in an orderly manner, but there are other considerations as well. It may be fair to say that the tone and conduct of meetings is a reliable reflection of the

way that the committee operates generally. The meeting should not be used as a forum for airing general complaints and grievances which have other channels for hearing. Disciplinary and personnel matters should be left to normal line management, personnel department, and union staff to handle, while the health and safety committee devotes its attention to health and safety matters. Individual cases of unsafe acts or conditions ('fix-it' items) are matters which should be routinely resolved through line management, not through a health and safety committee. When such items keep recurring during committee meetings, it is an indication of unclear terms of reference, or individuals failing to carry out their responsibilities. These items only become an appropriate topic for committee action where an inspection reveals general non-compliance with safety rules/procedures, or when other means to effect corrective action have failed. On the other hand, committee members must be aware of action taken to resolve cases of 'fix-it' items, in order to be able to disseminate the information or to take further action as a committee. Disagreement is to be expected on some issues, but these should be resolved in a non-adversarial atmosphere, based on known facts and logical thinking which lead to reasonable recommendations (see question 3.15). In an environment where labour and management have a history of confrontation, it may be wise to not include in the committee those management and union personnel involved in collective bargaining. It is very difficult for most individuals to switch from the posture of confrontation expected in bargaining to that of mutual co-operation required in health and safety committee work.

3.14 How are decisions reached at meetings?

The manner in which decisions on recommendations or future committee activities are made should be understood by all members. Formal voting should be avoided if possible because of its inherent 'taking sides' nature which hinders team building. No one individual should have veto power over what will be recommended. The ideal situation would be that consensus is reached through the process of allowing each person to present his arguments and having these debated by all committee members. Compromise solutions in the form of prioritized multiple recommendations or ones involving interim measures may be the way out of a seemingly insoluable impasse in members' opinions. If general agreement can be achieved, post-decision support from the entire committee (and all employees) is more likely to follow. The process of decision-making is a key element in determining committee cohesiveness and developing a spirit of mutual co-operation necessary for it to operate effectively.

3.15 Are all items of unfinished or new business concluded by definite recommendations for positive action?

Since the main function of most health and safety committees is to put forward recommendations, care should be taken in making them. By concluding each discussion on a business item with a definite recommendation, it is less likely that they will have to be addressed at meeting after meeting. As with any complex question, a useful method of checking the comprehensiveness of the response is to see if the questions, what?, why?, how?, where?, when?, and who? are answered. The problem should be stated in clear terms based on known facts. Normally, recommendations will be made on matters concerning newly reported hazards, known hazards which have not been dealt with by line management, or those requiring large expenditures of money which must be referred to higher authority. Why a solution is required may be phrased in general terms, preferably supported by relevant accident or health data, either from internal records or information gathered from outside industry sources. The committee should have investigated local problems thoroughly, trying to uncover their underlying causes. The recommended solution must be logical, meet all legislative requirements, and be the best conceivable practical method. The location and time frame should be specified in the recommendation. In some cases, such as when a waiting period is expected while new equipment is purchased and installed, an interim solution may be required. In any event, definite dates for implementation should be suggested. Finally, and perhaps most important, the individual(s) responsible for taking further action should be named. The health and safety committee should bear in mind that it is trying to sell a recommendation to higher management, and therefore should use all its expertise in presenting a convincing argument.

3.16 Are comprehensive minutes kept of meetings?

The basic reason for keeping minutes of health and safety committee meetings is to chronicle safety problems and specify what recommendations for corrective action have been made. They also serve to communicate safety to all workers and as a permanent record of health and safety committee activities.

Details generally included are:

- time and date of meeting
- who attended
- items discussed (reports, problems, statistics, education)

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- reasons for recommendations (and counter arguments voiced)
- recommendations (specifying action by whom, by when)
- time and date of next meeting.

The secretary should make notes during the meeting, using the agenda as a guide and write the minutes immediately after, while the proceedings are fresh in his memory. A verbatim transcription is not required or desirable, and the minutes should not be so long that they discourage workers from reading them.

3.17 Are the minutes available to management and committee members, and posted promptly for all workers to read?

Prompt dissemination of the minutes will bring safety problems under scrutiny by those concerned with followup action without delay, be they management for decision on recommendations, committee members for delegated tasks, or the work-force in general. It also indicates that the health and safety committee is operating efficiently, and emphasizes that safety is a priority item in the organization. Some jurisdictions require that minutes be forwarded to the employer/regulatory agency/organization representing the workers.

3.18 For what period of time are minutes retained on file?

Minutes of previous meetings are useful sources of information for a trend analysis of problems which may pin-point areas requiring more intensive investigation, the training of new committee members, or the determination of safety training topics. The length of time they are retained may vary with the frequency of the meetings and other factors, but a minimum of two years is suggested.

3.19 Do members work on safety matters at times other than formal meetings?

The emphasis given to health and safety committee meetings in this section should not be interpreted as an indication that a member's responsibilities are fulfilled mainly on these occasions. On the contrary, the most important work is performed outside meetings, in contact with the workers he represents. In addition to specially assigned projects, each

member should always be available as a health and safety advisor within his own work area. Most routine safety problems should be resolved with line supervisors, without having to resort to dependence on committee meetings for their solution.

4. EFFECTIVENESS

4.1 How does the committee measure its effectiveness?

In order to improve its efforts, a health and safety committee will want to have some measure of its past performance. In this way, weak areas can be strengthened and strong areas maintained. Although an improved health and safety record might be considered the most important measure, the question is not necessarily an easy one to answer. Having clearly defined its purpose (question 2.1) and identified specific duties (question 2.3), the committee can audit its work against these parameters. Further questions to assist this assessment form the subject of this section.

4.2 Is the identity of all members known to the workers?

That the health and safety committee may not be as effective as it might be is indicated when workers do not know who their health and safety committee members are. To adequately discharge his responsibilities, a committee member must communicate with the workers in his area on health and safety matters. Although each member should take the initiative in making himself known, this process can be facilitated by posting health and safety committee members' identities on notice boards (in some jurisdictions, a legislated requirement), instructing new workers during their health and safety orientation training, and by the committee member reporting at union and management meetings.

4.3 Are the duties and authority of members known to the workers?

The joint efforts of all workers are necessary to achieve maximum results from any safety program. Co-operation is enhanced when everyone understands the ground rules. The

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duties and authority of health and safety committee members should be posted for all to read, and form part of new employee indoctrination training.

4.4 Is the committee perceived by workers as not performing a useful function in providing leadership in safety?

A committee perceived by the workers as not performing a useful health and safety function will encounter obstacles which hinder possible improvement in its effectiveness and image. Feedback from workers may dwindle, co-operation may be lacking, and even outright opposition in dealing with safety matters may be experienced. On the other hand, the reverse usually holds true for committees with a positive image. Not only must the committee carry out its responsibilities as effectively as possible, but it should also consider how these actions are viewed in the minds of the workers. An aspect of human perversity is that bad news is news, while good news is no news. Safety committee failures and setbacks quickly become known, while its accomplishments may go relatively unnoticed. Committee members should communicate solutions as well as problems. Both types of discussions raise safety awareness.

4.5 Is the committee perceived by management as usurping its responsibilities and authority?

Even though management is represented on the health and safety committee, another potential constraint on the effectiveness of a committee may be the perception by some members of management that their individual responsibility and authority on safety matters have been expropriated, resulting in continual confrontation, or worse still, abdication of responsibility. Fortunately, the solution to this problem is relatively simple. Safety committee responsibility and authority should be clearly defined in writing, known to all, and followed by committee members. Managers should recognize that health and safety are legitimate concerns of both labour and management, and joint committees can play an important role in achieving greater worker participation in this vital issue.

4.6 Are members perceived by line supervisors as a barrier to worker/supervisor communication in safety?

In most Canadian jurisdictions, the legally recognized communication channel on safety matters is between worker and supervisor.

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Workers are to report unsafe acts and conditions initially to their immediate supervisor. He is responsible for acting on such reports and for directing his subordinates in working safely. Committee members should not interfere with this process, except under special circumstances, such as cases of imminent danger, where immediate corrective action is necessary. After such direct intervention, the member should advise the supervisor as soon as possible. Of course, there should be no restriction on a committee member discussing safety problems with the supervisor or on the supervisor seeking advice or assistance from him.

4.7 Is the committee perceived by labour as reducing management's responsibility for maintaining a safe workplace?

In some instances, labour opposition to health and safety committees has stemmed from the mistaken perception that these committees reduce or remove management's overall responsibility for safety in the workplace. To enhance the co-operation necessary for progress in health and safety matters, it must be clearly understood by all concerned that management responsibility for safety is in no way diluted or diverted with the formation of a joint health and safety committee.

4.8 Are members perceived as enforcers or advisors?

Individual committee members may alienate the workers they represent if they routinely act as enforcers while carrying out their safety duties. Ensuring compliance with safety regulations and procedures is the supervisor's job, while the committee member's role is more that of an observer and advisor.

4.9 Do workers make suggestions to members?

Effective two-way communication ensures that workers are aware of health and safety committee activities and gives them an opportunity to contribute ideas to the committee. When workers regularly make suggestions to committee members, it indicates that the communication channels are open and working the way they should. To maintain this mutual confidence, any worker who raises safety matters should be granted the courtesy of a response. When followup action is delayed, an interim report explaining the reasons should be given. Committee members should strive to promote input from workers by providing prompt feedback on all suggestions and ideas.

4.10 Does management representation on the committee reflect its strong commitment to safety?

Even with the best efforts of the health and safety committee, any program lacking senior management backing is likely to falter. One of the ways in which management can demonstrate its commitment to safety is in its choice of representatives appointed to the committee. A senior manager, preferably from the line organization, not only can expedite follow-up on recommendations, but also lends credibility to the committee and its activities generally. However, he should not dominate the committee, but participate as an equal partner.

4.11 Does management fully support committee activities by providing comprehensive information, time, facilities, and training?

True management support of committee activities (or lack of it) may be most readily evident in the provision of resources which are necessary for the committee to function effectively. Certain types of support, such as access to pertinent information, may be required under legislation. Resources which should be made available include:

- notification of accidents and of occupational disease
- information on potentially hazardous materials/processes
- reports on health and safety
- statistics
- time to carry out safety duties
- safety reference material
- necessary monitoring equipment
- allocation of space for meetings
- general and specific safety training.

4.12 In a unionized workplace, what support does the union provide to its members on the joint committee?

Union support of its members on a joint health and safety committee can be evaluated by assessing such inputs as the way in which members are selected, amount of education provided on union health and safety policies, facilitating attendance of members at health and safety seminars, and assistance rendered in situations where an impasse has occurred in making committee recommendations.

4.13 What proportion of members' time during paid work hours is spent on safety activities?

It may be difficult to assess accurately what proportion of a member's time is spent on safety activities, but this ratio can serve as another indication of the importance given to safety in the organization. One end of the scale is where the only time is that devoted to committee meetings, while the other is where the committee has adequate time to fully discharge its responsibilities.

4.14 How many committee recommendations have been implemented?

The previous four questions represent an attempt to evaluate management and union support of health and safety committee activities. A measure more directly related to the committee's credibility and effectiveness is the number of significant recommendations which have been implemented. If this number is small in relation to those not implemented, it may indicate lack of management commitment to safety, unrealistic recommendations by the committee, or both. Any of these conditions lead to an ineffective committee. For its part, the committee should seek feasible solutions to safety problems, and present them in comprehensive form, as discussed in question 3.15.

4.15 When a recommendation is not implemented, are the full reasons disclosed to the committee?

There may be valid reasons why recommendations made by the health and safety committee cannot be implemented, either immediately or in the long term. A delay might be encountered when new equipment or construction is involved, or when corporate authorization is needed. In any event, after management has considered the proposal, the reasons for non-implementation should be communicated to the committee, which then can explore alternate solutions to the problem. Failure to do this promptly in all cases can lead to misunderstandings and a perception of lack of management commitment to safety.

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4.16 Is the full record of committee recommendations, their implementation, and reasons for non-implementation available to all workers?

If a high degree of safety awareness is to be maintained throughout the workplace, all workers need to be kept informed on all safety problems and their solutions. Through the media of comprehensive minutes, personal contact with committee members, and oral reports at union and management meetings, the health and safety committee's recommendations, implemented solutions, and reasons for non-implementation must be made known to all. Contrary to the usual prevailing situation, committee successes need to be publicized at least as well as the occasional failures.

APPENDIX

List of Questions

1.1 Is a committee legally required?
1.2 Does the committee structure meet legal requirements?
1.3 How many members are there on the committee?
1.4 What is the ratio of management to labour members on the committee?
1.5 How are labour members on the committee selected?
1.6 Do members have relevant work experience?
1.7 Are appropriate people appointed?
1.8 Are there alternates for each member?
1.9 What is the term of office?
1.10 Is the safety co-ordinator's role relative to the committee clearly defined?
1.11 How many committees are there?
1.12 Are ad hoc committees or sub-committees formed when necessary?
1.13 Are members compensated for time spent on health and safety committee activities?
1.14 Are members trained in health and safety?
1.15 Is the structure reviewed periodically and revised when necessary?

2.1 Is the purpose of the committee clearly defined?
2.2 To whom does the committee report?
2.3 Are members' duties clearly defined?
2.4 Is a list of duties available for each member?
2.5 Are duties reviewed periodically and revised when necessary?
2.6 Do committee activities support, but not supplant, the firm's safety policy?
2.7 Do members understand the role of the health and safety committee within the overall safety program?
2.8 Do members know what their duties are?
2.9 Do members carry out their duties?
2.10 Is the committee's authority clearly defined?
2.11 Do members know the extent of their authority?
2.12 Is the degree of authority reviewed and revised when necessary?
2.13 Do members exceed their authority?

3.1 Does the committee meet regularly?
3.2 Is 100% attendance achieved at meetings?
3.3 Are meetings frequently postponed?
3.4 What time of day are meetings held?
3.5 Where are meetings held?
3.6 Do meetings start and stop on schedule?
3.7 Are meetings frequently interrupted?
3.8 Are the chairman's duties and authority clearly specified?
3.9 Are the secretary's duties clearly specified?
3.10 Is an agenda prepared for each meeting?
3.11 What is the procedure for inclusion of new items of business on the agenda?
3.12 Is the agenda distributed to all members well before each meeting?
3.13 Is meeting time used in a productive manner?
3.14 How are decisions reached at meetings?
3.15 Are all items of unfinished or new business concluded by definite recommendations for positive action?
3.16 Are comprehensive minutes kept of meetings?
3.17 Are the minutes available to management and committee members, and posted promptly for all workers to read?
3.18 For what period of time are minutes retained on file?
3.19 Do members work on safety matters at times other than formal meetings?

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4.5 Is the committee perceived by management as usurping its responsibilities and authority?
4.6 Are members perceived by line supervisors as a barrier to worker/supervisor communication in safety?
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